

Progress Report
Progress toward the Recommendations of the
Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE)
As of July, 2012

Recommendation 1: Kentucky should adopt and distribute the school readiness definition to local communities, schools, state agencies and early childhood advocates.

The definition of kindergarten readiness proposed by the ECDE has been adopted and widely distributed. It has been promoted by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood (GOEC), the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), and the Division of Child Care (DCC) in the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS). The definition provided the basis for selecting a kindergarten readiness screener. The definition is distributed at every speaking opportunity, including 12 formal appearances this fiscal year engaging more than 1000 participants. The definition and its corresponding measure forms the basis for evaluating the work of the Community Early Childhood Councils. KDE is currently working on a communications package that will be widely distributed for use by schools, Head Start, child care, school boards, pediatricians and others.

Recommendation 2: Working in cooperation with the ECAC, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) should identify and implement a screening tool for children's transition and entry into kindergarten and coordinate its use with other child assessment requirements.

The Assessment Workgroup of the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), chaired by Felicia Cumming Smith, Deputy Commissioner of KDE, has crafted, and the Kentucky Board of Education has adopted, a regulation for a common kindergarten readiness screen to be administered by all school districts to screen all children at kindergarten entry, to assess the readiness for kindergarten across developmental domains. An open Request for Proposals was issued and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has now contracted with Curriculum Associates, LLC and will be using the BRIGANCE® Kindergarten Screen.

The screener regulation was presented to Administrative Regulation Review Subcommittee and passed on June 12th with testimony from KDE and the GOEC in support of the Regulation.

The screener will be used in all Kentucky kindergarten classrooms to provide information to teachers and parents to support children's learning. Schools and districts also may use this data to collaborate with families and communities to ensure all children are receiving developmentally appropriate educational instruction leading to success.

It is anticipated that the kindergarten readiness screener will be mandatory and fully implemented in all kindergarten classrooms in the 2013-14 school year. However, KDE invited

school districts to volunteer to use the BRIGANCE® Kindergarten Screen during the 2012-13 school year, either in all schools or in selected schools. To date, 107 school districts have announced their desire to implement the screener in 2012 – 13. Participating districts will be trained during the month of July.

The kindergarten screener will not be used to determine eligibility for kindergarten. Educators will use the screener to observe students as they complete specific tasks. Data collected from the kindergarten readiness screener will inform teachers of each child's readiness to learn.

Information at the county level will be broadly available to communities through local Councils (CECCs) to help inform community planning to improve kindergarten readiness community-wide.

Recommendation 3: Kentucky should develop a governance model for the system of early childhood services in the Commonwealth.

By Executive Order, Governor Beshear created and appointed members to the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), a broadly representative group of early childhood educators, administrators, and advocates in July of 2011, and appointed Rick Hulefeld as the chair. The Governor also appointed Terry Tolan as Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Early Childhood (GOEC) and ECAC. This body replaced the Early Childhood Development Authority that had governed the KIDS NOW initiative since the passage of House Bill 706 in 2000, assumed all of their responsibilities, and broadened their mandate to include implementation of the ECDE recommendations stated here.

The ECAC met 7 times in FY 2012, supporting the Kentucky Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant application and organizing itself to achieve the Governor's vision for early childhood in the Commonwealth. The ECAC has seven workgroups made up of more than 80 members who are taking work forward in the following areas: Assessment, Community Collaboration, Community Engagement, Data, Professional Development, Program Investment, and STARS for KIDS NOW quality rating system. All work groups are chaired by ECAC members and broadly representative of local and state experts in their particular subject matter. They have committed to specific objectives to accomplish in the 2012 calendar year, all totally aligned to the ECDE recommendations. Work groups provide regular reports to the ECAC.

Recommendation 4: Increase opportunities for, and reduce barriers to, collaboration and coordination at all levels of the early childhood system through provision of technical assistance, use of incentives and development of measures to assess and evaluate collaboration and coordination efforts.

This recommendation is arguably the hallmark of the ECDA recommendations and the Governor's charge to the ECAC, in that it is infused throughout every aspect of the work of the

ECAC and the GOEC. The overarching principle that guides all of our work is to create a much more unified system of services to support families and their young children.

Kentucky offers a wide range of services to families and children from prenatal to school entry. These services are delivered through a variety of state government agencies, local government, health, mental health, social service entities, non-profit and for-profit providers, and federally funded quasi-government entities. Numerous state programs in multiple state agencies and cabinets administer existing early childhood programs creating a fragmented system that is confusing to many. Different state and federal funding requirements make program alignment and effective communication difficult.

The competing missions of funding sources, differing rules, standards and processes, ownership and responsibilities create significant barriers to collaboration and coordination of state, regional and local-level programs and services. Further threat is posed by current economic conditions that strain public and private resources. Additionally, the culture of each community can curtail or enhance collaboration and coordination. Collaboration among the policy and provider agencies is essential to realizing the maximum benefit for public investment in early childhood services.

In order to accomplish these objectives, the ECAC and the GOEC work continuously to increase dialogue among GOEC, KDE, and the CHFS on issues related to early childhood care and education, thus assuring better alignment at the state level. In addition, collaboration is mandated at the local level through participation requirements for the Community Early Childhood Councils (CECCs). We have established the demonstration of collaboration and coordination with other early care and education providers as a condition of funding for grant eligibility.

We recently piloted a “collaboration needs assessment survey” with Head Start programs that will shortly be replicated with the larger early childhood community. All ECAC Workgroups are also mindful of the importance of including Head Start, public preschool, child care and families in their plans to improve services. The degree to which we are able to knit together this complex system will determine our future success in many areas.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that Early Childhood Standards are widely distributed and used effectively in the programming for high quality child care, early care and preschool programs, Head Start and used across the education community, including postsecondary programs.

First developed in 2003, the Kentucky Early Childhood Standards represent specific learning standards for children from birth through 4 years of age. These standards are designed as a framework to assist parents, early care and education professionals, administrators and others in understanding what children should know and be able to do at intervals from birth through 4

years of age. This work was revolutionary at the time and is now being reproduced in states across the country. These standards have been widely distributed and effectively used across early childhood systems including KDE, Head Start, Child Care and CECCs.

The Assessment Workgroup is currently undertaking an update of the Early Childhood Standards to assure they are aligned with the kindergarten readiness definition and with Head Start standards. This will lay the groundwork for an expansion of training and for uniform use across programs. This work will be incorporated with the Professional Development Framework core content, the Continuous Assessment Guide, and the parent guides. The Workgroup plans to take these revisions to the ECAC for review in November of 2012.

Recommendation 6: Support the work of KDE in the promotion of a model curriculum framework for public preschools and related review of kindergarten standards.

In 2010 and 2011, the Kentucky Department of Education convened a workgroup to design and develop a state-level model curriculum framework in fulfillment of KRS 158.6451 Section 1(2). A design team representing key stakeholders across the Commonwealth worked from September 2010 to the present on the state-level model curriculum framework. The process for the design and development of the Kentucky Model Curriculum Framework (KMCF) required strong and dynamic communication and transparency to ensure that all interested parties were connected to this work and were provided opportunities for input.

The completed framework serves as a guide to instructional supervisors, principals and teachers on the process for designing and reviewing local curriculum. The document reflects the needs of a 21st century knowledge economy and is intended to ensure all children receive high-quality educational experiences from preschool through postsecondary education. In the action steps for designing and reviewing a school's curriculum, the guidance recommends school staff become familiar with the Kentucky Early Childhood Standards (KYECS) and their alignment to the Kentucky Core Academic Standards (KCAS) to support successful transition from preschool to kindergarten, as well as primary to intermediate and beyond.

Though the KMCF 2011 was released in June 2011, the vision for the framework is that of an evolving resource that encourages continuous development and refinement. The Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System (CIITS) will be instrumental in making the KMCF a web-based resource using embedded links and enabling multiple views and access.

In addition, a separate workgroup of stakeholders addressed the alignment of the KYECS with the KCAS in the areas of mathematics and English Language Arts. The 2011 alignment document serves to ensure that the early childhood standards for three-and- four-year-old children are aligned to the expectations of KDE for students in kindergarten. The alignment supports preschool and primary teachers with connecting the foundational skills of preschoolers wto the

academic expectations for primary students, ensuring smooth transitions as children move into the primary program.

The next step in alignment starts with the finalization and state adoption of the national Next Generation Science Standards. A new workgroup of birth through kindergarten stakeholders will be convened in the fall/winter to begin review of the national science standards (draft) and revised early childhood science standards for alignment. KDE recommends that the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) Assessment Workgroup take a critical role in this important work, as a logical extension of their task to revise the KYECS.

Recommendation 7: Identify strategies including incentives and other supports to increase participation in the STARS for KIDS NOW program to make it more meaningful to parents.

Substantial progress has been made in increasing participation in the STARS for KIDS NOW quality rating system since this recommendation was made. Today, we are at historic high, with statewide participation in STARS currently at 1,065. The statewide penetration rate has increased to 36% overall after consistently hovering around 25% for a number of years. Strides have been taken to increase awareness through:

- Implementation of the STARS for KIDS NOW website, <http://www.chfs.ky.gov/dcbs/dcc/stars/> which gives parents the ability to search for STARS rated facilities in their county and provides information on elements of quality for parents and providers
- STARS marketing materials were distributed to all health departments in the state of Kentucky to help target families prenatally
- STARS marketing materials have been distributed at a number of events
- All Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) local offices are provided with marketing material to inform parents of the STARS for KIDS Now Program
- The Division of Child Care gives priority to STARS centers for current and future incentives which come through the Division
- The STARS program now includes alignment of expiration dates with licensing expiration dates, less duplicative monitoring, and more collaboration with the Division of Regulated Child Care in various observations, streamlining the process for facilities

In addition to actions taken by the Division of Child Care in CHFS, the STARS Workgroup of the ECAC, chaired by Tracy Haddix, has undertaken a comprehensive review of the current quality rating system (QRS). The review will look at innovations in systems across other states in the years since Kentucky's QRS was developed in 2001 and make recommendations for changes to the current QRS. They will also attempt to identify, for the first time, the actual cost to programs of moving up the STARS rating scale.

Recommendation 8: Strengthen the role of the Community Early Childhood Councils by simplifying the grant process and identifying the needs of each local community to determine support for the local council.

The Community Collaboration Workgroup of the ECAC, chaired by Bill Scott of the Kentucky School Board Association, and the GOEC have focused intensely on the work, best practices, competencies and needs of Community Early Childhood Councils (CECC) in 2012. We believe that, at their best, CECCs are effective agents for change in local systems that benefit families and children. They can bring together diverse members of their local community and mobilize them to work in concert to achieve community level improvements in kindergarten readiness.

We began our work by surveying funded and unfunded councils to assess their challenges and opportunities and, most of all, to learn their best practices. We envision a much larger role for Councils going forward. CECCs have largely been focused on improving early childhood settings, increasing participation in the STARS for KIDS NOW rating system and offering professional development opportunities to improve the early care and education workforce. While all of these continue to be important endeavors, and because we now know that there may be as many as 50% of our children not in organized settings, they are not sufficient to get all of our children ready for kindergarten. We, through CECCs, must mobilize communities across the Commonwealth to commit to improved early childhood outcomes. This also means we must find ways to engage parents and families.

Our survey identified a number of best practices in structure and in activities undertaken. Related to structure, we found that the strongest CECCs were those that had substantial engagement from the local schools, Head Start, and child care at a minimum. Our criteria for funding in 2012-13 requires that all three entities be engaged. We also collected best practices of CECCs who were engaging families in meaningful ways. These both were emphasized in our 2012 Request for Applications (RFA).

For the 2013 funding cycle, we received “intents to apply” from all 120 twenty counties, through 90 councils, compared to 90 counties and 66 councils in 2011. We hosted a two-day CECC Annual Institute in late May, themed as “Engaging Parents, Families and Communities”. 157 CECC members attended from 68 councils (representing 94 counties). The top categories of those who attended were:

- School district: 20.8%
- Head Start: 15.1%
- Childcare: 20.8%
- Family Resource Centers: 11.3%

This is an encouraging indicator of greater cross-sector collaboration.

Applications were due on June 15, 2012. 69 applications were received (representing 105 counties). While only 2 more applications were received this year than last (67 last year, 69 this year), 10 more counties are now represented by an active CECC (8.3% increase). At least 4 counties indicated that they did not have sufficient time to organize a new council but intended to apply next year. Preliminary analysis of the proposed activities and community outcomes in the applications shows a dramatic increase in activities aimed at increasing parent awareness and understanding of early childhood development and what will be expected of their child at kindergarten entry – 122 activities in 2011 and 202 in 2012, a 60% increase.

The ECAC will approve recommendations for funding at the July meeting.

The Community Collaboration Workgroup and the staff are committed to providing year-round ongoing training and technical assistance to local Councils to improve their capacity to impact change in their communities.

In summary, substantial progress has been made on all of the Task Force recommendations in the first year.